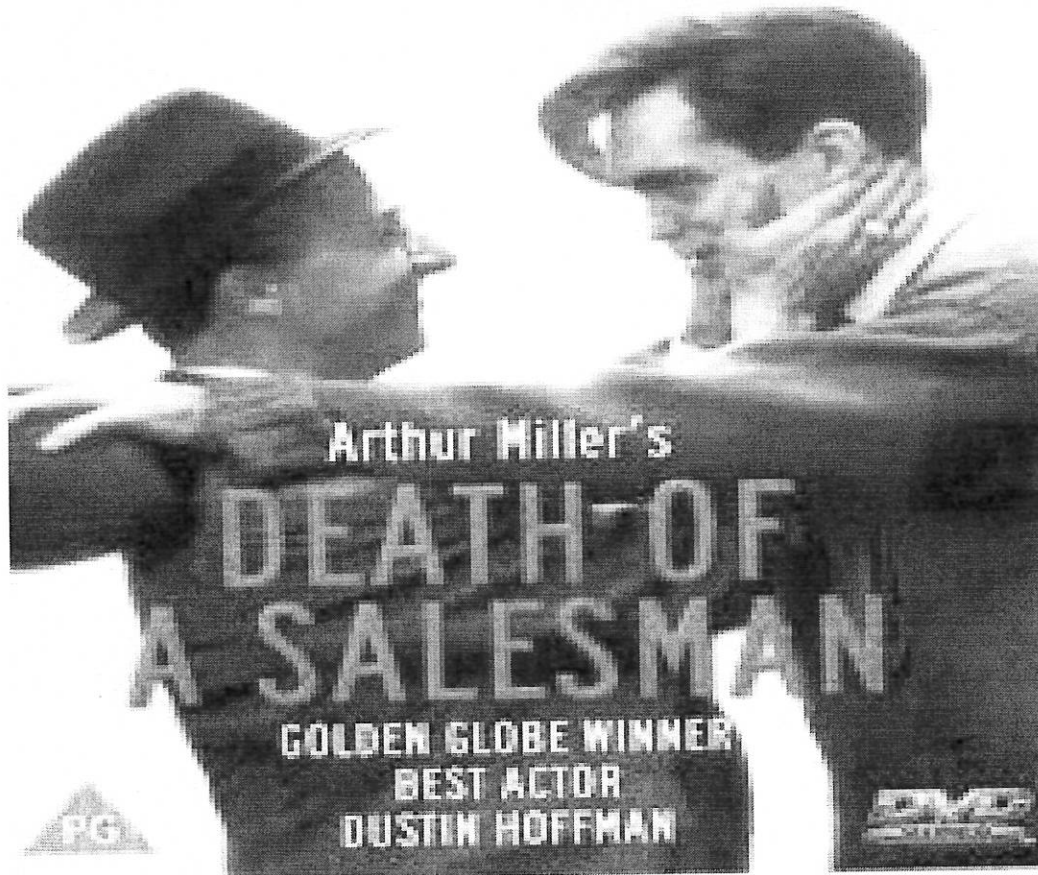


SPECIAL COLLECTORS EDITION

DUSTIN
HOFFMAN

JOHN
MALKOVICH



"I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England."

"The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want."

"The woods are on fire, boys."

"After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive."

Biff: "Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!"

Willie: "I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!"

What is the American Dream?

The term was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* which was written in 1931. He states: "The American Dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

In the United States' Declaration of Independence, our founding fathers: "...held certain truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." Might this sentiment be considered the foundation of the American Dream?

Were homesteaders who left the big cities of the east to find happiness and their piece of land in the unknown wilderness pursuing these inalienable Rights? Were the immigrants who came to the United States looking for their bit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, their Dream? And what did the desire of the veteran of World War II - to settle down, to have a home, a car and a family - tell us about this evolving Dream? Is the American Dream attainable by all Americans? Would Martin Luther King feel his Dream was attained? Did Malcolm X realize his Dream?

Some say, that the American Dream has become the pursuit of material prosperity - that people work more hours to get bigger cars, fancier homes, the fruits of prosperity for their families - but have less time to enjoy their prosperity. Others say that the American Dream is beyond the grasp of the working poor who must work two jobs to insure their family's survival. Yet others look toward a new American Dream with less focus on financial gain and more emphasis on living a simple, fulfilling life.

Thomas Wolfe said, "...to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunitythe right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him."

Is this your American Dream?

Malcolm X (born **Malcolm Little**; May 19, 1925 – February 21, 1965) was an African American Muslim minister, public speaker, and human rights activist. To his admirers, he was a courageous advocate for the rights of African Americans, a man who charged white America in the harshest terms for its crimes against black Americans. He has been described as one of the greatest and most influential African Americans in history.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968) was an American clergyman, activist and prominent leader in the African-American civil rights movement. His main legacy was to secure progress on civil rights in the United States and he is frequently referenced as a human rights icon today.

Discussion Questions

What is the American Dream?

How is the American Dream characteristic of American ideals and philosophy?

What are the differences between the materialistic and the idealistic values associated with the American Dream?

How does the American Dream of the 1940s differ from the American Dream of today?

"Let America Be America Again" by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.

O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!

"I Hear America Singing" by Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand
singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as
he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning,
or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work,
or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Compare and contrast the two poems.

How does Langston Hughes portray the American Dream?

How does Walt Whitman portray the American Dream?

Are their views positive or negative?

Do the poets have an optimistic or pessimistic view on the attainment of the American Dream?

How do the poems affect your view of the American Dream? Do you feel like the Dream is realistic?

Death of a Salesman | Overview and Study Guide Packet

The Life and Work of Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller was born October 17, 1915, in New York City, to Isadore and Augusta Barnett Miller. He grew up with an older brother and a younger sister and received his earliest schooling in Harlem in the 1920s. His middle-class family fell upon difficult times when his father's clothing business experienced devastating economic damage, forcing the family to move to Brooklyn shortly before the Depression.

At Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, Miller was more an athlete than a scholar; an average student, he did not read much literature, preferring instead boys' adventure stories. Because his parents could not afford to send him to college when he graduated high school in 1932 (in the middle of the Depression), he worked at several jobs, including one at an auto parts warehouse and one as a radio singer. He saved enough money during this time to enter school at the University of Michigan, where he had applied earlier but was rejected.

In college, his growing interest in literature led him to write a number of successful plays as an undergraduate. For two of them, *No Villain* (1936) and *Honors at Dawn* (1937), he received the University of Michigan's prestigious Hopwood Award. After graduating from Michigan, Miller married Mary Grace Slattery in 1940, worked briefly for the Federal Theatre Project (the Depression-era government agency that paid young writers for their work), and wrote short radio scripts.

In 1944, during World War II, Miller traveled to several army bases in the U.S. as a researcher for the 1945 film *Story of G.I. Joe*. Miller published his observations in *Situation Normal*, describing one soldier's feelings after returning from war. The account reveals Miller's distrust of the easy and blind patriotism that he thought characterized popular literature and film in America. Miller's desire to question the motives behind conventional sentimentality toward war comes through in *Death of a Salesman* as well, where the American dream seems to lose its innocent veneer.

Miller's most successful Broadway plays have been *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which won the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and *The Crucible* (1953). *The Crucible* – set during the seventeenth-century witch trials of Salem, Massachusetts – was a pointed criticism of the then-current “witch-hunt” that U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy led against American politicians and public figures thought to be associated with Communism. At that time (the 1950s), the U.S. was in the middle of the Cold War, an ideological battle with the Soviet Union. Historians have roundly condemned the frenzy with which McCarthy and others sought to attack, often with no foundation, Americans interested in communism, socialism, or significant socioeconomic change. Miller himself was called before the hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and convicted of contempt of Congress when, stating he was not himself a Communist, he refused to name people he had met at a Communist writers meeting. The conviction was later overturned on a technicality.

Associated with politically left causes and organizations throughout his career, Miller did not always reflect his political concerns directly in his writings. Like Henrik Ibsen, the late nineteenth-century Norwegian playwright whom he admired, Miller tended toward realism in his style. Miller's realism, though, was a social and psychological realism that took advantage of time-shifts, memories, and

innovative set design to articulate characters' complex relations to their social, economic, religious, familial, and gender roles. In addition to *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, Miller's most notable plays included *All My Sons* (1947), *An Enemy of the People* (1950, adapted from Ibsen), *A View from the Bridge* (1956), *After the Fall* (1964), *Incident at Vichy* (1964), *The Price* (1968), *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1977), and *The American Clock* (1980). He also wrote *Focus*, a novel about anti-Semitism, a topic that greatly occupied Miller and that informed both *Incident at Vichy* and his television screenplay *Playing for Time* (1980). Miller's autobiography, *Timebends: A Life* (1987), and *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller* (1978) give insight into his life and his theories on drama. His works have enjoyed several new stage, film, and television productions over the years and are consistently produced by small theaters around the country.

Miller and his wife Mary Grace Slattery divorced in 1955, and in 1956, Miller married movie star Marilyn Monroe. Because of both Miller and Monroe's fame at that time, the marriage received enormous publicity. The two celebrities divorced in 1961, and in 1962 Miller married photographer Ingeborg Morath, with whom he continues to live in Connecticut.

Historical Background

Miller tells the reader at the outset of the play that *Death of a Salesman* takes place "in the New York and Boston of today." When the play opened, "today" meant 1949, a moment in American history when many people -- riding an economy rescued from the Great Depression of the 1930s by the domestic industrial boom of World War II (1939-45) -- found a more prosperous life within reach. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, many pursued "the American dream" of hard work rewarded by middle-class signs of success such as a house, a car, a college education, and household appliances. The dream held the possibility for greater personal wealth, even while African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans,

Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and new immigrants struggled to gain the civil rights that would give them equal opportunity to chase that dream. *Death of a Salesman* has frequently been understood as a commentary on the American dream and whether (1) the dream's economic prosperity is truly available to anyone who works diligently, and (2) the importance the dream places on material wealth invites selfishness and social injustice.

By 1949, World War II was over, Harry Truman was president of the United States, and the U.S. had not yet begun its involvement in the Korean War (1950-53). The Cold War with the Soviet Union brought a nuclear arms race as the U.S., a victor of World War II, asserted its role as not only a political and military world power but as an overwhelming international cultural force. American movies and manufactured goods were exported along with the American dream and American capitalism. By the end of the 1940s, Americans earned an average of 15 times the yearly wage of the rest of the world, a fact that reveals the overall wealth of the U.S., albeit a wealth that was extracted from but not shared with the working-class people in the U.S. and foreign countries. Despite the looming possibility of nuclear war and, for many, the often elusive "better life," Americans' optimism dominated public discourse with, as Miller's play suggests, a buoyancy comparable to loyalty to one's favorite sports team.

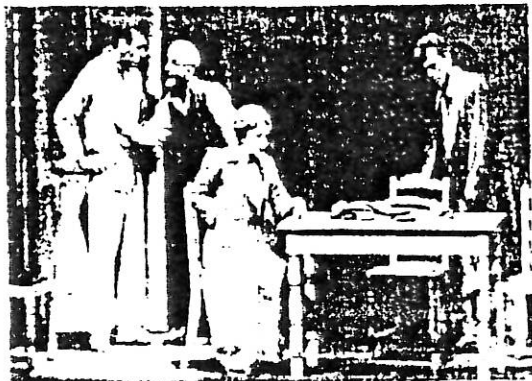
Although television had been invented before the end of the 1940s, it did not fully surpass radio in prominence and audience size until several years later. And while traveling salesmen are rare in the 1990s, they were common in the 1940s, selling items such as brushes and vacuum cleaners door-to-door.

Social relations were also different from today. Linda Loman's role as a loyal and often shy housewife and mother does not necessarily represent all women's lives in the 1940s, nor does Miller necessarily approve of the role. However, her behavior does suggest the cultural notions, common in that period, of restrained, even timid, femininity; and, as the play bears out, masculinity of the time was overly identified with the virile figures of the athlete, businessman, and soldier.

Death of a Salesman opened on Broadway at the Morosco Theatre on February 10, 1949 and ran for more than two years, tallying 742 performances. Its initial success has been reinforced by several regional, repertory, and touring productions over the years. One of its most famous productions was in Beijing, China, during a time (1983) when the U.S. and China were staunch ideological opponents. The play's most recent notable revival starred Dustin Hoffman as Willy Loman in 1984. While reading *Death of a Salesman*, the reader should remember that it is not a novel, but a play meant for the stage. As such, the play asks the audience to notice not just what is being said by characters, but what music, costumes, set design, and unheard actions contribute to the overall effect.

The general public has continually come out to see *Death of a Salesman* in significant numbers, drawn to the pathos of its central character, Willy Loman, whom audiences tend to regard as a symbol of the ordinary American. Although the play appears to pose as one of its central questions how much sympathy Willy deserves, Miller himself has endorsed the idea that the play is a tragedy in the true dramatic sense of the word – a tragedy of the common man, the "low man." As this historical background sketch has shown, *Death of a Salesman* owes much to its historical moment; nevertheless, the idea of a tragedy of the common man imbues the play with a sense of timelessness – even if that quality might eventually be linked to a particularly American, post-World War II way of thinking.

Some critics and academics have not liked *Death of a Salesman* and dispute its status as a viable tragedy. They argue that Willy is not a compelling protagonist but merely a pitiful man, a loud-mouth and cheat. Compared with the other two most prominent mid-twentieth-century American playwrights – Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams – Miller's plays in the tradition of socially and politically conscious realism usually do not achieve the formal, Expressionist innovation of his predecessor O'Neill or the poetic writing of his contemporary Williams. Nonetheless, *Death of a Salesman* possesses enough of both styles to have earned praise for its innovative stage orchestration of space and memory, as well as its several captivating speeches, at once earnest and self-deceiving.



Master List of Characters

Willy Loman - The "salesman" of the play's title.

Linda Loman - Wife of Willy, mother of Biff and Happy.

Biff Loman - Elder son of Willy and Linda.

Happy Loman - Younger son of Willy and Linda, often simply called Hap.

Ben Loman - Willy's older brother (Biff and Happy's uncle). He made his fortune in African diamonds as a very young man.

Charley - Neighbor of the Lomans. He is called Uncle Charley by Biff and Happy, even though he is not their actual uncle.

Bernard - Charley's son, who helps Biff with his homework and whom Willy, Biff, and Happy tease for being an unmanly bookworm.

Howard Wagner - Willy's boss, who is younger than Willy. Howard's father had been Willy's boss until his death.

The Woman - The woman with whom Willy has an extramarital affair during his sales trips to Boston.

Miss Forsythe - A woman whom Biff and Happy meet in the restaurant. (She is referred to as simply "Girl" in the play before her name is given.)

Letta - Miss Forsythe's friend. She eventually joins Miss Forsythe, Willy, Biff, and Happy at the restaurant.

Stanley - A young waiter at the restaurant where Biff, Happy, and Willy meet in Act II.

Jenny - Charley's secretary.

CHARACTERS

Willy Loman - Traveling Salesman
Willy Loman - Traveling salesman for the Wagner Company for 34 years. Born in Brooklyn; age 63. Lower-middle-class, little education, no evidence of political, moral or religious beliefs. Abrupt mood swings. Ruined by rejection, criticism, failure, self-doubt, and especially by his self-delusions. Symbolic name "Loman" suggests "low man" on the totem pole. Haunted by his memory of the affair with the Woman in Boston. His major flaw is his false idea that success depends on being "well-liked." His major desire is to be accepted and loved by everyone-especially by his son Biff.

Linda - Willy's unselfish, loving wife. Represents traditional American values; family, loyalty, hard work. Sees through Willy's lies but still encourages them because she realizes that illusions are all that Willy has.

Biff - Willy's oldest son; age 34. A drifter, petty thief, and laborer. Former high school football star, all-American boy; shattered by his father's affair with the Woman. Loves the outdoors. Discovers that being truthful about himself will free him from the lies of the past.

Happy (Hap) - Willy's younger son; age 32. Clerk in the department store. Lonely, desperate for love. As a child, he tried to lose weight to impress Willy; as an adult, he competes with his bosses by seducing their fiancées. Fails to see the value of truth in assessing his life.

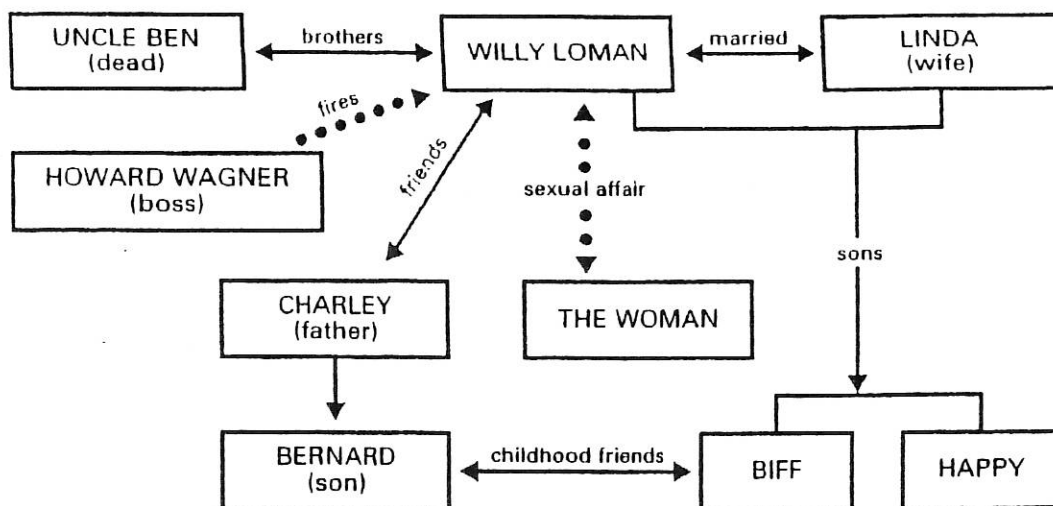
Charley - Willy's next-door neighbor and only friend. Successful businessman, good Samaritan, well adjusted. Contrasts Loman to show opposite traits. He is everything that Willy wants to be and is not.

Bernard - Charley's son. Successful, reliable, hardworking lawyer. As a child, criticized by the Lomans for being studious rather than "well liked."

Uncle Ben - Willy's older, dead brother. Self-made man, ruthless. Personifies wealth, power, and success.

Miss Francis - The Woman in Boston with whom Willy has his affair.

Howard Wagner - Willy's shrewd boss; son of Willy's original boss. Family man, and unsentimental about Willy's problems.



TIME LINE (an overview of events mentioned in the play as they relate to Willy's life)

(Note: There are few dates to clarify the time of this play, but certain details, such as the nomination of Al Smith, the sports careers of Gene Tunney and Red Grange, and the invention of the tape recorder indicate the general setting.)

infancy Willy's father makes and sells flutes as the family travels over Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and the West.

age 3 years, eleven months Ben leaves home in South Dakota to search for his father in Alaska.

age 7 Ben returns from Africa, a wealthy man at twenty-one.

age 18 or 19 Willy, who is a traveling salesman, longs to go to Alaska.

age 27, March Willy goes to work for Frank Wagner's firm.
Howard Wagner is born.

age 29 Biff is born.

age 31 Happy is born.

age 38 Linda and Willy buy a house.

around age 42 In 1928, Willy averages \$170 per week in commission.

age 46 Biff plays football at Ebbets Field and is wooed by three colleges, including the University of Virginia.
Ben offers Willy a position as overseer of his Alaskan timberland.

June Biff fails math and does not graduate from high school.
Biff discovers his father's infidelity at the Standish Arms in Boston.

July Biff stays gone from the block for a month, then returns and burns his sneakers in the furnace.

age 47 or 48 Biff serves as stock clerk at Bill Oliver's sporting goods store.

age 50 or 51 Willy pawn's the watch fob with the diamond in it.

age 53 Biff steals a carton of basketballs from Bill Oliver's store.
Before World War II, Biff leaves home and tours the West.

age 62 Willy begins having a series of car mishaps.

age 63 Biff serves three months in a Kansas City jail for stealing a suit.
Willy is forced to work on straight commission.
Linda finds a rubber hose near the gas pipe in the basement.

three weeks later Ben dies in Africa.

Monday, two weeks later Willy's car strays onto the shoulder of the road past Yonkers.
Biff returns home from Texas.

Tuesday, 10 a.m. Willy gets up and prepares to visit Howard Wagner's office.

later Bernard leaves for Washington where he will plead a case before the Supreme Court.

Tuesday, 5 p.m. Biff sees Bill Oliver.

Tuesday, 6 p.m. Happy meets Biff and Willy at Frank's Chop House.

after nightfall Willy apparently commits suicide.

later Linda makes the final mortgage payment.
Willy is buried.

How To Be a Good Wife

(taken from a 1950's high school home economics textbook)

Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal - on time. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they come home and a well prepared, warm meal is a warm welcome home.

Prepare yourself. Take fifteen minutes to rest so that you will be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your makeup, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh looking. He has just been with a lot of work weary people. Be a little gay and a little more interesting. His boring day may need a lift.

Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives, gathering up school books, toys, papers, etc. Then run a dust cloth over the tables. Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order and it will give him a lift.

Prepare the children. Take a few minutes to wash the children's hands and faces (if they are small), comb hair and, if necessary, change their clothes. They are little treasures and he would like to see them playing the part.

Minimize all the noise. At the time of his arrival, eliminate all noise of the washer, dryer, dishwasher or vacuum. Try to encourage the children to be quiet. Be happy to see him. Greet him with a warm smile and BE GLAD to see him.

Some don'ts. Don't greet him with problems and complaints. Don't complain if he is late for dinner. Count this as minor compared to what he might have been through that day. Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or suggest that he lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool (or warm) drink ready for him. Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soft, and pleasant voice. Allow him to relax and unwind.

Listen to him. You may have a dozen things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him speak first.

Make the evening his. Never complain if he does not take you out to dinner or to other pleasant entertainment. Instead, try to understand his world of strain and pressure, his need to unwind and relax.

THE GOAL: TRY TO MAKE YOUR HOME A PLACE OF PEACE AND ORDER WHERE YOUR HUSBAND CAN RELAX IN BODY AND SPIRIT.

Death of a Salesman | Themes

Appearances vs. Reality

What appears to be true to the characters in *Death of a Salesman* is often a far cry from reality, and this is communicated numerous times throughout the play. Willy's frequent flashbacks to past events—many of which are completely or partly fabricated—demonstrate that he is having difficulty distinguishing between what is real and what he wishes were real. Willy's imagined conversations with his dead brother, Ben, also demonstrate his fragile grip on reality. Willy's mind is full of delusions about his own abilities and accomplishments and the abilities and accomplishments of his sons. Biff and Happy share their father's tendency to concoct grand schemes for themselves and think of themselves as superior to others without any real evidence that the schemes will work or that they are, indeed, superior. At the end of the play, each son responds differently to the reality of his father's suicide. Biff, it appears, comes to the sad realization that his father "didn't know who he was," and how his father's unrealistic dreams led him away from the satisfaction he could have found if he had pursued a goal that reflected his talents, such as a career in carpentry. Happy, who had previously given the appearance of being more well-grounded in reality but still hoping for something better, completely falls into his father's thought pattern, pledging to achieve the dream that his father failed to achieve.

Individual vs. Society

Willy is constantly striving to find the gimmick or the key to winning over clients and becoming a true success. He worries incessantly about how he is perceived by others, and blames his lack of success on a variety of superficial personal traits, such as his weight, the fact that people "don't take him seriously," his clothing, and the fact that he tends to talk too much. While all of these concerns are shared by many people, for Willy they represent the reasons for his failure. In reality, Willy's failure is a result of his inability to see himself and the world as they really are: Willy's talents lie in areas other than sales, and the business world no longer rewards smooth-talking, charismatic salesmen, but instead looks for specially trained, knowledgeable men to promote its products. Willy fails because he cannot stop living in a reality that does not exist, and which dooms him to fail in the reality that does exist.

Individual vs. Self

Willy's perception of what he should be is continually at odds with what he is: A mediocre salesman with delusions of grandeur and an outdated perception of the world around him. He truly believes that he can achieve greatness, and cannot understand why he has not realized what he feels is his true destiny. He completely denies his actual talent for carpentry, believing that pursuing such a career would be beneath him somehow. Willy struggles with the image of his ideal self his entire life, until he can no longer deny the fact that he will never become this ideal self and he commits suicide.

American Dream

Willy's quest to realize what he views as the American Dream—the "self-made man" who rises out of poverty and becomes rich and famous—is a dominant theme in *Death of a Salesman*. Willy believed wholeheartedly in this treasured national myth, which began during colonial times, and which was further developed during the 19th century by such industry tycoons as Andrew Carnegie and J.D. Rockefeller. In the 1920s, the American Dream was represented by Henry Ford, whose great success in the automotive industry was achieved when he developed the assembly line.

Also in the 1920s, a career in sales was being hailed as a way for a man without training or education to achieve financial success. Pamphlets, lectures, and correspondence courses promoting strategies for improving the skills of salesmen were widely distributed during this decade. These strategies focused on teaching salesmen how to effectively manipulate their clients. Willy would have begun his career as a salesman in the 1920s, when belief that salesmen adept at manipulation and "people skills" were destined for wealth and fame was widespread. However, by the late 1940s, when *Death of a Salesman* takes place, the job market and prevailing belief has changed, and salesmen (and other workers) required specialized knowledge and training in order to succeed. Because he lacks such knowledge or training, Willy is destined to fail in a business world that demands the ability to play a specific part in a large establishment. Willy, of course, does not realize how things have changed, and he continues to try to strike it rich using his powers of persuasion. Willy's personal representations of the American Dream are his brother Ben and the salesman Dave Singleman, and he views the success of these two men as proof that he can indeed attain the success he is so desperate to achieve. According to Willy's version of the American Dream, he is a complete failure.

Death of a Salesman | Act I, Part 1: Questions

1. In what city does Willy Loman live?
2. What surrounds Willy's house?
3. In what way has Miller used transparent walls to indicate when characters are in the past rather than the present?
4. What is Willy's job?
5. From where has Willy returned early? Why?
6. Does Willy have confidence in his ability to do his own job?
7. Who has come home to visit Willy and Linda?

8. Whom does Willy criticize and why?

9. Why does Willy stop his criticizing?

10. Who begins to listen to Willy and Linda's conversation just before Willy goes to the kitchen to make a sandwich?

Death of a Salesman | Act I, Part 2: Questions

1. How old are Biff and Hap during their conversation in the bedroom? Does that conversation take place in the past or the present?

2. What was Biff's latest job? What kind of job or career can he not bear?

3. Why doesn't Hap accept Biff's invitation to go West to start a farm?

4. In what kind of unethical behavior has Hap engaged?

5. What plan does Biff tell Hap about as the brothers fall back asleep? Why is Biff somewhat nervous about the plan?

6. How does the audience know that a flashback occurs?

7. Is Willy bashful or shy about his ability as a salesman?

8. How are Biff and Hap different from Bernard?
9. According to Willy, what makes someone successful?
10. How might the flashback affect what you think of the Biff and Hap in the present?

Death of a Salesman | Act I, Part 3: Questions

1. What do we learn about Willy's ability as a salesman as this section of the play begins?
2. Does Willy ever doubt that he is attractive and well liked?
3. What memory or daydream does Willy have immediately after he tells Linda, "You're the best there is"?
4. What gift does Willy not give to Linda, even though he does give it to someone else?
5. Why does Willy scream at Linda and Bernard to "Shut up!"?
6. Do Willy and Charley play cards in the present or in the past of a flashback?
7. Who is Ben and why does Willy admire him?
8. Why is the watchman chasing Biff?

9. What does Charley offer Willy as they play cards? Does Willy accept?

10. Does Willy's conversation with Ben convince Willy that he has been raising his sons correctly?

Death of a Salesman | Act I, Part 4: Questions

1. Where does Linda lay the blame for Willy's disoriented, hallucinatory condition?

2. While trying to convince Biff that he should stop continually fighting with Willy, does Linda argue that Willy has no faults?

3. Why is it that "attention must be paid" to Willy?

4. Why must Willy borrow \$50 every week from Charley?

5. According to Biff, why did Willy originally throw him out of the house many years ago?

6. What did Linda learn about Willy from the insurance inspector?

7. What hidden object has Linda recently discovered and why has it caused her to worry?

8. Why does Biff intend to ask Bill Oliver for a loan?

9. What does Willy think of Biff's idea to ask Oliver for a loan?

10. What does Biff remove from behind the gas heater?

Death of a Salesman | Act II, Part 1: Questions

1. In the morning, Willy tells Linda he will buy something for the backyard. What does he intend to buy and what does Miller seem to mean by this purchase?

2. As he leaves the house, what does Willy plan to ask Howard?

3. What message does Linda relay to Willy from Biff and Hap?

4. Why do Linda's stockings make Willy nervous?

5. What machine does Howard show Willy? How might Howard's comments about this machine make Willy uncomfortable?

6. Does Willy receive a non-traveling job or does he continue in his old job as traveling salesman?

7. Who is Dave Singleman and what significance does he hold for Willy?

8. What reasons does Howard give for not granting Willy's requests and finally firing him?

9. Why does Willy mention Howard's father?

10. Where does Howard suggest Willy look for support?

Death of a Salesman | Act II, Part 2: Questions

1. Who does Willy "meet" after Howard fires him?
2. When Willy tells his brother that "nothing is working out," what opportunity does Ben offer Willy?
3. What does Linda think of Ben's offer?
4. What two things does Linda mention to persuade Willy of her opinion about his current job?
5. Does Willy accept Ben's offer?
6. When Willy asks one last time if Ben approves of his ideas about business and the way he has raised his son, how does Ben respond?
7. Why is it an important day for Biff?
8. Does Charley expect Willy to accept his invitation to play cards?
9. Why does Willy challenge Charley to fight?
10. What comment does this scene as a whole make about Willy's mood after being fired by Howard?

Death of a Salesman | Act II, Part 3: Questions

1. How has Bernard changed from when he was a boy?
2. What is Bernard's job and what will he do in Washington, DC?
3. Why did Biff not graduate from high school?
4. What big question does Bernard ask Willy? How does Willy respond?
5. According to Charley, why doesn't Bernard mention the reason for his trip to Washington, DC?
6. Why does Willy ask Charley to borrow more than the usual \$50?
7. Other than a loan of money, what does Charley offer Willy? Does Willy accept?
8. Does Willy conceal from Charley the fact that Howard fired him?
9. What does Charley say about Willy's belief that success would come "if a man was impressive, and well liked"?
10. What might Willy mean when he says, "you end up worth more dead than alive"?

Death of a Salesman | Act II, Part 4: Questions

1. What lies does Hap tell and why?
2. Did Bill Oliver give Biff the loan? Does Biff tell Hap that he got the loan or not?
3. What particular memory causes Biff to exclaim, "I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been"?
4. What did Biff steal from Oliver's office? Why?
5. What does Willy want to tell Linda?
6. What are the three flashbacks, memories, or hallucinations that Willy experiences while talking to Biff and Hap?
7. What story do Biff and Hap concoct when Willy's behavior becomes increasingly confusing and frightening?
8. Why does Biff tell Willy, "I'm no good, can't you see what I am?"
9. Why does Willy excuse himself from the table to go to the bathroom?
10. Do Biff, Hap, and Willy leave the restaurant together?

Death of a Salesman | Act II, Part 5: Questions

1. Who is The Woman?
2. Approximately what age is Biff when he visits Willy in Boston?
3. What event causes Biff to come to Boston to see Willy?
4. What favor does Biff ask Willy to do?
5. What gift does The Woman insist that Willy give her before she will leave his room?
6. How does Willy initially explain the presence of The Woman in his room?
7. What is Biff's reaction to finding The Woman in his father's room? What does he yell at Willy as he leaves the room?
8. Why is Linda angry with Biff and Hap when they return to the house?
9. What does Linda order Biff and Hap to do? How does Biff respond?
10. Where is Willy at the end of this section? What is he doing?

Death of a Salesman | Act II, Part 6: Questions

1. What is Willy's "proposition"?
2. What effect does Willy think his death will have on Linda and Biff?
3. Will the insurance company pay if it determines that Willy's death is a suicide rather than an accident?
4. What is Biff's solution to ending the conflict between him and his father?
5. What object does Biff show Willy?
6. Has Biff spited Willy?
7. Does Ben approve of Willy's "proposition"?
8. What effect does Willy anticipate his death having on the continuing competition he imagines between Bernard and Biff?
9. By the end of the scene, is Willy still angry with Biff?
10. How does Willy kill himself? What does the audience see or hear that reveals Willy's death?

Death of a Salesman | Requiem: Questions

1. Do many people attend Willy's funeral?
2. What is Hap's mood? What does he plan to do?
3. According to Charley, to what should we attribute Willy's frustration and death?
4. Where does Biff think Willy actually put his greatest feeling – into his job as a salesman or elsewhere?
5. According to Biff, why did Willy live a life of misplaced hope, a life that ended in suicide?
6. Will Biff stay in New York and pursue the career Willy hoped he would?
7. Has Willy's family received the \$20,000 that Willy thought the insurance company would pay them upon his death?
8. Why does Linda find it hard to understand why Willy killed himself?
9. What words does Linda repeat as the play ends?
10. What music lingers as the play ends? What becomes more prominent visually at the same time?